

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

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SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF SINGAPORE'S PERCEPTION OF THE SOVIET
MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC

REF: STATE 187556

1. INTRODUCTORY NOTE: PARA 5 OF REF INSTRUCTION INDICATES
DEPARTMENT VIEWS SOVIET PACIFIC FLEET AS PRIMARILY STRUCTURED
TO COUNTER NAVAL FORCES OF THE U.S. AND TO A LESSER EXTENT,
JAPAN AND CHINA. ALTHOUGH THIS MAY EXPLAIN THE WAY IN WHICH
THE SOVIET FLEET IS STRUCTURED, WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT ITS
GRADUAL EXPANSION IS ALSO AIMED AT SUPPORTING AN ACTIVE DIPLOMACY
WHICH IS DESIGNED TO PROMOTE AND ENHANCE SOVIET POLITICAL POWER
AND INFLUENCE IN THE REGION. IN THIS CONNECTION, WE BELIEVE
THE SOVIETS WISH TO CREATE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEIR POWER
AND INFLUENCE ARE INCREASING CONSTANTLY, WHILE THE CAPABILITIES
AND ROLE OF THE U.S. ARE COMMENSURATELY ON THE WANE.

2. SUMMARY: SINGAPORE'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND TOP NATIONAL
SECURITY OFFICIALS ARE ACUTELY AWARE AND CONCERNED OVER THE
GRADUAL EXPANSION OF SOVIET NAVAL FORCES IN THE PACIFIC. THE

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MEASURE OF THEIR CONCERN IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THEIR ASSESSMENT

OF THE EXTENT AND DURABILITY OF THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO THE REGION. THE GOVERNMENT'S AWARENESS OF THE INCREASING SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IS SHARED BY ELITE ELEMENTS IN SOCIETY, BUT NOT BY LESS EDUCATED ELEMENTS. THE GOS HAS ALWAYS DISTRUSTED THE SOVIET UNION AND IT FEARS THAT THE GROWING MILITARY POWER IN THE PACIFIC WILL INVITE COMPETING EFFORTS FROM THE PRC (IN THE FORM OF SUBVERSION), AND IN THE PROCESS UNDERMINE THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE COUNTRIES OF SEA. THEREFORE, THE GOS HOPES THE U.S. WILL MAINTAIN A FORWARD STRATEGIC POSTURE IN THE REGION WITH ADEQUATE STRENGTH TO BACK IT, THEREBY CONTRIBUTING TO A STABLE EQUILIBRIUM OF POWER. ALTHOUGH THE GOS EXHIBITS A PARTIALITY TOWARD THE U.S. IN ITS SPECIFIC ACTIONS, IT PURSUES PUBLICLY AN EVEN HANDED POLICY TOWARD THE MAJOR POWERS. ITS CONCERN OVER GROWING SOVIET NAVAL POWER AND ITS POTENTIALLY DESTABILIZING IMPACT ON THE REGION HAS BEEN A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN INCREASING GOS EFFORTS TO PROMOTE THE STRENGTH AND COHESION OF ASEAN. END SUMMARY.

3. SINGAPORE'S AWARENESS OF SOVIET NAVAL DEVELOPMENT:
THE TOP GOS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, THE MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE AND THOSE OFFICIALS CHARGED WITH INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES ARE ACUTELY AWARE OF AND CONCERNED OVER THE GRADUAL EXPANSION OF SOVIET NAVAL FORCES IN THE PACIFIC. THE EXTENT OF THEIR CONCERN IS CLOSELY RELATED TO THEIR ASSESSMENT OF THE COMMITMENT AND CONSTANCY OF THE UNITED STATES. IF THE UNITED STATES COMMITMENT TO THE AREA WERE REGARDED AS BOTH EXTENSIVE AND DURABLE, THE GOS WOULD BE LESS CONCERNED ABOUT THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE THAN IF THE OPPOSITE WERE THE CASE. SINCE THE FALL OF INDO-CHINA AND THE DEPARTURE OF U.S. FORCES FROM THAILAND, THE GOS HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED OVER THE REDUCTION OF U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE FROM THE REGION AND THEREFORE INCREASINGLY WORRIED ABOUT THE GRADUAL BUILD-UP OF SOVIET NAVAL POWER IN THE PACIFIC.

4. THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRINCIPAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ADVISOR, THE DIRECTOR OF THE SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE DIVISION (SID) OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, S.R. NATHAN, PREPARES AT LEAST ANNUALLY AN OVERALL REPORT ON SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN AND AROUND SINGAPORE INCLUDING BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN SOVIET

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SHIPPING TRANSITING THE STRAITS OF MALACCA. THIS REPORT REFLECTS DETAILS OF INCREASES/DECREASES IN THE SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE AND DISCLOSES A SURPRISING KNOWLEDGE OF SOVIET WRITINGS ON NAVAL STRATEGY. THE INTELLIGENCE ARM OF THE SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES ALSO HAS A MODEST CAPABILITY FOR INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION WHICH IS PART OF THE TOTAL INPUT.

5. THE EXISTENCE OF ONLY LIMITED COLLECTION FACILITIES BEYOND

THE IMMEDIATE AREA OF SINGAPORE AND THE PRESENCE OF ONLY A VERY SMALL STAFF TO ANALYZE AVAILABLE RAW MATERIAL PROBABLY MEAN THAT THE GOS NECESSARILY HAS A RESTRICTED AND IMPRECISE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOVIET PRESENCE BEYOND THE STRAITS. HOWEVER, THE GOS HAS UPON OCCASION RELIED ON U.S. OFFICIAL SOURCES TO COMPLETE ITS ANALYSES. DESPITE THE LIMITATIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE, SID APPEARS TO HAVE DEVELOPED A DISTINCT PERCEPTION OF THE OVER-ALL THRUST AND STRATEGY OF THE SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE, AND JUDGING FROM CONVERSATIONS WHICH HIGH LEVEL VISITORS HAVE HAD WITH TOP LEADERS SUCH AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE, GOH KENG SWEE, SID HAS BRIEFED WELL THE TOP LEADERS WHOM SID SERVES. ALTHOUGH SID'S ESTIMATES ARE PROBABLY MADE AVAILABLE TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND SENIOR MFA OFFICIALS, THERE IS LITTLE INDICATION THAT THEY ARE DISSEMINATED BEYOND POLICY MAKING CIRCLES.

6. THE MILITARY IS FIRMLY UNDER CIVILIAN CONTROL AND NORMALLY ADOPTS THE POINT OF VIEW EXPRESSED BY THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.7 ON THE QUESTION OF SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC, THE SINGAPORE MILITARY ARE EQUALLY AWARE AND CONCERNED OVER THE GRADUAL EXPANSION OF SOVIET NAVAL POWER.

7. DURING THE PAST THREE YEARS THE LOCAL PRESS HAS CARRIED FREQUENT ARTICLES USUALLY BASED ON WIRE SERVICE REPORTS CONCERNING THE RISE IN SOVIET NAVAL POWER EAST OF SUEZ, THE DEBATE IN THE UNITED STATES CONCERNING THE RELATIVE POWER OF THE RUSSIAN AND U.S. NAVIES AND U.S. PLANS TO AUGMENT THE FACILITIES AT DIEGO GARCIA. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT'S AWARENESS OF THE INCREASING SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IS GENERALLY SHARED BY ELITE ELEMENTS IN SOCIETY, ESPECIALLY TOP BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL CIRCLES. ALTHOUGH THEIR KNOWLEDGE IS NOT SPECIFIC, THEY DO HAVE A GROWING AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM. THIS AWARENESS HAS RECENTLY BEEN HEIGHTENED BY AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER
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FRASER'S STATEMENTS CONCERNING THE SOVIET THREAT IN THE PACIFIC. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE THINK THERE IS VERY LITTLE CONCERN ON THE PART OF LESS EDUCATED ELEMENTS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC WHO ARE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE PROBLEMS OF EVERYDAY EXISTENCE. SINCE SOVIET COMBAT SHIPS DO NOT CALL AT SINGAPORE AND SOVIET MERCHANT SHIPS PROVIDE A HANDSOME BUSINESS AT LOCAL SHIPYARDS, SOME ELEMENTS OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND SHIPYARD WORKERS MAY VIEW THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN RELATIVELY FAVORABLE TERMS.

8. ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION ITSELF: THE GOS CONSIDERS IT INEVITABLE THAT THE SOVIET UNION AS A MAJOR WORLD POWER CAN NOT REALISTICALLY BE PREVENTED FROM EXERTING SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE IN THE PACIFIC REGION. HOWEVER, THE GOS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND ELITE ELEMENTS IN SOCIETY HARBOR A GENERAL DISTRUST OF THE SOVIET UNION AND BELIEVE THAT

THE USSR INTENDS TO EXPAND ITS POLITICAL/MILITARY INFLUENCE TO A POINT WHERE IT WILL PROVE TO BE DESTABILIZING. THE INCREASING SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE HAS CONFIRMED AND HEIGHTENED THIS DISTRUST. IT IS DOUBTFUL, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOS WOULD ADOPT POLICIES TOWARD THE USSR WHICH WOULD PRECIPITATE EITHER A CRISIS IN GOS/SOVIET RELATIONS OR LEAD TO THE COMMERCIAL DISADVANTAGE OF SINGAPORE.

9. THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE AREA: SINGAPORE SEEKS AN EQUILIBRIUM OF POWER IN THE REGION AMONG THE U.S., PRC, USSR AND POSSIBLY JAPAN, AT LEAST IN THE ECONOMIC SENSE. THE GOS FEARS THAT IF THE USSR CONTINUES TO INCREASE ITS MILITARY STRENGTH AND INFLUENCE IN THE AREA, IT WILL INVITE COMPETING EFFORTS FROM THE PRC (POSSIBLY IN THE FORM OF SUBVERSION), AND IN THE PROCESS UNDERMINE THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE COUNTRIES OF SEA. THEREFORE, THE GOS HOPES THAT THE U.S. WILL MAINTAIN A FORWARD STRATEGIC POSTURE IN THE REGION WITH SUFFICIENT MILITARY STRENGTH TO BACK IT. THE GOS BELIEVES THAT ONLY THROUGH MAINTAINING SUCH A BALANCE CAN SINGAPORE HOPE TO MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY. THE GOS IS PROBABLY AWARE THAT ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS WEIGH IN FAVOR OF THE U.S., JAPAN AND THE PRC. HOWEVER, THE GOS ATTACHES A HIGH VALUE TO SOVIET

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DETERMINATION, AND IS CONCERNED THAT IF THE SOVIETS PERSIST AND THE MILITARY BALANCE TILTS TOO MUCH IN FAVOR OF THE USSR AND ITS SOCIALIST COHORT, VIETNAM, FOREIGN INVESTORS WILL BE INCREASINGLY RELUCTANT TO RISK ADDITIONAL VENTURE CAPITAL IN THE REGION. EVENTUALLY THE ECONOMIES OF THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION WOULD BEGIN TO FALTER AND INTERNAL POLITICAL STABILITY WOULD BE GRADUALLY ERODED.

10. THE DESIRABLE COURSE OF RELATIONS WITH THE MAJOR POWERS. SINGAPORE'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP PURSUES PUBLICLY AN EVEN-HANDED POLICY TOWARD THE MAJOR POWERS. HOWEVER, IN ITS SPECIFIC ACTIONS (E.G. IN PURCHASE OF WEAPONS SYSTEMS) AS WELL AS IN CONFIDENTIAL DISCUSSIONS, IT OFTEN EXHIBITS AN EVIDENT PARTIALITY FOR THE U.S. ITS PUBLIC POSTURE OF MAINTAINING A ROUGH EQUI-DISTANCE BETWEEN THE MAJOR POWERS IS DESIGNED IN PART TO PRESERVE ITS MEMBERSHIP IN THE NON-ALIGNED CLUB, AND IN PART TO KEEP OPEN THE OPTION OF MOVING AWAY FROM THE U.S. AND CLOSER TO OTHER MAJOR POWERS IN THE EVENT THE U.S. DECIDES TO REDUCE FURTHER ITS COMMITMENT AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE REGION. THE COMMERCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL ELITE HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY ORIENTED BOTH ECONOMICALLY AND CULTURALLY TOWARD THE U.S. AND MIGHT FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ADJUST THEIR ATTITUDES IN THE EVENT
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THE GOVERNMENT SHIFTED TO A LESS FRIENDLY POSTURE TOWARD THE U.S.

11. THE DIRECTION REGIONAL EFFORTS SHOULD TAKE: THE INCREASING SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE AND CONCERN OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF A FURTHER AMERICAN MILITARY WITHDRAWAL FROM THE REGION HAVE BEEN CONTRIBUTING FACTORS IN THE GOS EFFORT TO PROMOTE THE STRENGTH AND COHESION OF ASEAN. ALTHOUGH THE GOS BELIEVES THE PRIMARY THREAT TO THE REGION IS INTERNAL SUBVERSION AND EXTERNALLY SUPPORTED INSURGENCY, IT FEARS THAT GROWING SOVIET MILITARY POWER MAY ENCOURAGE VIETNAM TO SUPPORT INSURGENCY IN THAILAND AND ULTIMATELY MALAYSIA AND EVOKE A COMPETING EFFORT BY THE PRC TO SUPPORT PRO-PRC SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS. THE GOS DOES NOT BELIEVE THIS THREAT CAN BE DEFEATED BY TURNING ASEAN INTO A MILITARY ALLIANCE (ALTHOUGH IN PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW'S RECENT NATIONAL DAY SPEECH HE SPOKE OF "GOOD COORDINATION IN MATTERS OF SECURITY" AMONG THE ASEAN POWERS). IT DOES BELIEVE THAT A MAJOR ASEAN EFFORT TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC COOPERATION THROUGH TRADE LIBERALIZATION AND INVESTMENT PROJECTS WHICH IMPACT POSITIVELY ON THE MASSES OF THE ASEAN COUNTRIES IS THE BEST WAY TO OPPOSE SUBVERSION AND PROMOTE POLITICAL STABILITY.

12. INDIAN OCEAN ISSUES: SINGAPORE'S POSITION AS AN ENTREPOT AND AS A REGIONAL OIL REFINING CENTER DEPEND TO A LARGE EXTENT ON KEEPING THE SEA LANES OF THE INDIAN OCEAN OPEN TO THE

SHIPS OF ALL NATIONS. PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW IS ALSO SENSITIVE TO JAPAN'S STRATEGIC DEPENDENCE ON OIL SHIPMENTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST WHICH TRANSIT THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE MALACCA STRAIT. SINCE THE GOS DISTRUSTS SOVIET MOTIVES, IT IS CONCERNED OVER ITS GROWING MILITARY POWER IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. THE GOS NOMINALLY SUPPORTS THE INDIAN OCEAN ZONE OF PEACE, BUT DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIET UNION CAN EVER BE PERSUADED TO REDUCE ITS MILITARY PRESENCE IN THIS AREA AND WOULD LIKE TO SEE SOVIET POWER BALANCED OFF BY THE U.S. CONSEQUENTLY, IT PRIVATELY WELCOMES U.S. PLANS TO AUGMENT THE FACILITIES AT DIEGO GARCIA, AND PUBLICLY SUPPORTS A BALANCE OF U.S./SOVIET FORCES IN THE AREA. THE GOS WOULD NOT BE WILLING, HOWEVER, TO TAKE ANY OVERT ANTI-SOVIET ACTION SINCE THE GOS MUST KEEP ITS OPTIONS OPEN IN THE EVENT THE SOVIETS EVENTUALLY EXERCISE DOMINANCE OVER THE INDIAN OCEAN.

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13. BASE, ALLIANCE AND NUCLEAR ISSUES: THE GOS WANTS TO SEE THE U.S. RETAIN ITS BASES IN THE PACIFIC REGION TO ENSURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE U.S. SEVENTH FLEET. THIS HAS CAUSED SINGAPORE'S LEADERSHIP TO SUPPORT QUIETLY THE EXPANSION OF U.S. FACILITIES AT DIEGO GARCIA, TO ADMONISH THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES AGAINST REQUIRING THE DEPARTURE OF U.S. FORCES AND TO CONTINUE TO ACCOMMODATE VISITS OF THE SEVENTH FLEET TO SINGAPORE. THIS POSTURE DOES NOT, HOWEVER, EXTEND SO FAR AS TO COUNTENANCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF U.S. BASES IN SINGAPORE ITSELF, ALTHOUGH THE GOS MAY BE PREPARED TO EXTEND CERTAIN ADDITIONAL MILITARY FACILITIES TO THE U.S. MILITARY UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS. THE PRINCIPAL REASONS WHICH PREVENT THE GOS FROM GIVING U.S. MILITARY UNITS UNLIMITED ACCESS TO SINGAPORE FACILITIES ARE (A) ITS UNCERTAINTY OVER U.S. RESOLVE TO MAINTAIN A STRONG FORWARD MILITARY POSTURE IN ASIA, (B) ITS INTEREST IN REMAINING A MEMBER OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT AND (C) ITS DESIRE TO AVOID SOVIET REQUESTS FOR MILITARY FACILITIES. SINGAPORE TENDS TO PLACE LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN ALLIANCES AND BELIEVES MUTUAL INTEREST IS A FAR MORE EFFECTIVE BASIS FOR SECURITY COOPERATION. APART FROM ITS INTEREST IN ENSURING PROPER SAFEGUARDS FOR VISITS BY NUCLEAR POWERED WARSHIPS, THE GOS DEVOTES LITTLE ATTENTION TO NUCLEAR ISSUES WHICH IT REGARDS AS BEING TOTALLY BEYOND ITS CONTROL.

14. THE ROLE JAPAN SHOULD PLAY: SINGAPORE WOULD WELCOME AN INCREASED JAPANESE POLITICAL ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IF THE GOJ COULD PLAY SUCH A ROLE DISCREETLY AND SKILLFULLY AND WITHOUT STIRRING UP LATENT SENSITIVITIES REMAINING FROM WORLD WAR II. THE GOS WOULD PROBABLY WELCOME A GREATER ASSUMPTION BY JAPAN OF SECURITY RESPONSIBILITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA, THUS FREEING U.S. FORCES FOR OTHER AREAS. IN VIEW OF THE SCARS LEFT BY WORLD WAR II, THE GOS AND THE SINGAPORE ELITE WOULD PROBABLY BE ALARMED

BY ANY MAJOR RESURGENCE OF JAPANESE MILITARY POWER. THE GOS HOPES THAT JAPAN WILL EXPAND ITS ECONOMIC INVESTMENT IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA IN WAYS WHICH WILL NOT AROUSE NATIONALISTIC ANIMOSITY AGAINST JAPAN.

15. NATIONAL VULNERABILITIES: THE INCREASED SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC HAS HEIGHTENED SINGAPORE'S ALREADY ACUTE SENSE OF VULNERABILITY TO EXTERNAL FORCES. THE GOS
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WOULD CONSIDER HOSTILE ACTION AGAINST SINGAPORE BY SOVIET FORCES TO BE MOST UNLIKELY. HOWEVER, SINCE SINGAPORE IS TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON TRADE, THE LEADERSHIP IS CONCERNED THAT SOVIET CONTROL OF THE SEA LANES COULD DISRUPT THE ECONOMY OF THE COUNTRY IN THE EVENT OF CONFLICT BETWEEN THE MAJOR POWERS. MORE GENERALLY, THE GOS IS FEARFUL THAT GROWING SOVIET MILITARY POWER WOULD PROVIDE THE USSR GREATER DIPLOMATIC LEVERAGE IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE AREA AND COULD INSPIRE COMPETING EFFORTS BY THE PRC TO GAIN INFLUENCE THROUGH SUBVERSION.

16. THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF NATIONAL MILITARY FORCES:
SINGAPORE'S MILITARY FORCES ARE IN NO WAY INFLUENCED BY SOVIET FORCE STRUCTURE AND/OR RELATIVE U.S./USSR MILITARY STRENGTH. THEY ARE DETERMINED ALMOST ENTIRELY BY THE PERCEIVED THREATS FROM WITHIN THE REGION ITSELF AND NOT FROM ANY THREAT POSED BY THE SOVIETS. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT CURRENT SINGAPORE EFFORTS TO BUILD A SMALL BOAT NAVY (FAST PATROL BOATS, MINESWEEPERS, ETC.) ARE DESIGNED IN PART TO KEEP THE WATERS OF THE STRAITS OF SINGAPORE OPEN IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT OF POSSIBLE HOSTILE ACTION BY INDONESIA, MALAYSIA OR POSSIBLY EVEN VIETNAM.
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